Edinburgh Castle is at the heart of the myth and reality of Scottish history. Remarkably, this is the first time that an authoritative chronological description has been attempted - and achieved with great success. The symbolism of the Castle has always somehow overridden the reality of this monument, which provides the narrative for the endeavours of the people of Scotland over many centuries.

Of a known 4000 year occupation on the Castle Rock, the first 3500 years are covered by the first quarter of the book. These pages would have been considerably reduced without the evidence provided by the rescue excavations undertaken between 1988-91, carried out in advance of the major redevelopment which included the construction of a vehicle tunnel.

Ian MacIvor’s excellence as a student of the architecture of medieval Scotland comes to the fore in his lively discussion of the development of the Castle as it enters the comparatively bright light of the reign of James III (1460-88), at which time the documentary record and the extant architectural remains combine to offer concrete clues as to the appearance of the evolution of this great palace. Dubiety still exists regarding this evolution, and I for one would have been helped by some phased sketch reconstruction drawings of the suggested development of the buildings around “the summit of prestige” (Crown Square).

MacIvor’s marvellous descriptions of the sieges and political intrigues of the 16th and 17th centuries provides the framework for not only understanding the monument, but also for comprehending this complex period of Scottish History. After all, it was the period which witnessed the transition from Royal Palace to Garrison Fortress, with the creation of the first standing armies.
The complete story is unveiled, up to and including provisions for modern visitors coming full circle to the modern activities which resulted in the stripping away of the centuries of royal and military episodes, to reveal the prehistory set out at the start of the book. The choice and scale of illustrations is, at times, open to criticism - some rather plain architectural photos are reproduced too large. At the same time there are some obvious omissions - notably Slezer’s 1695 drawing of the Castle, executed while he was Governor, including his imaginative additions of tiers of star shaped artillery defences. While the latter were never constructed, he does provide an amazingly accurate and detailed record of the Castle at that time. Slezer’s beautiful drawing is included, however, in another excellent book in the series, entitled “Fortress Scotland and the Jacobites”, which has just been published in summer 1995, to mark the 250th anniversary of the uprising.

The Edinburgh Castle volume is the first in a major new series where leading authors interpret the major Scottish archaeological and architectural monuments for a wide readership. This nbook and the others in the series will be of great interest to those with a general interest, as well as to more serious students of Scottish culture. At this point six of the twenty or so books in the series have been published, with four appearing each year. All follow a similar format, and are priced the same.

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